

# Unwritten Rule

by the Marysue Murderess

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Summary: Samurai don't feel. They do what they're told. You send them to war, but they never go home. You feed on their bones, live on through their names, and pray for their souls that a god can't save.

## 1. Prologue:

**\*\*Prologue: Bloody Soot\*\***

...

Samurai don't feel.

>They do what they're told.<br>You send them to war,

>but they never go home.<br>You feed on their bones, live on through their names,

>And pray for their souls that a god can't save.<p>

...

"Get up."

Tomoe Gozen shook her head, burrowing deeper into the mound of blankets she had only just warmed. She was far too tired to function, having stayed up almost all night long mending the enormous hole in the guestroom wall. Tomoe had planned to finish before any paying customers arrived and noticed something was amiss, but she still desperately needed to finish repainting the wall before sunrise.

Thoroughly exhausted, Tomoe vowed not to move a single centimeter.

Her brother had other plans.

Atsushi kicked her as hard as he could, jamming his heel into the

curvature of Tomoe's bent stomach and pushing as hard as he could. Tomoe shrieked, clutching her stomach as pain throbbed throughout the entirety of her form.

Biting back a curse, Tomoe rose from beneath the blankets and fixed her youngest brother with the harshest glare she could manage.

"Why would you do that?!" Tomoe cried indignantly, "I was sleeping \_so \_well!"

Atsushi scowled at her, shaking his head. "There are more important things to worry about at the moment, Momo. There's been a fire."

>Instantly, Tomoe's senses were on red alert.<p>

"Where?" She whispered, golden eyes darkening dangerously.

\_Is everyone else all right? \_She wondered.

Tomoe was tempted to kick Atsushi just as hard as he had her, but she paused in the hopes of gleaning a proper explanation from her youngest sibling. Tomoe's heart pounded with worry as she waited for Atsushi to speak.

"A group of samurai came just a few hours ago and set fire to Uncle's house. He and Baby Jiro were trapped inside, and Father fears they may be dead. Auntie escaped, though, but she's severely burned. Now, everyone is outside trying to quell the flames. We can't have them spread throughout the compound, so we need \_everyone\_ to help out. And that means you, too, Tomoe." Atsushi hastily explained, already standing back up from his position on the floor.

Tomoe's stomach clenched with worry.

"Understood," She stammered.

Quickly, she righted herself, pulling on her sandals and dusting off her haori. As she did so, Tomoe noticed several peculiar black marks on her thighs and clothing that \_definitely \_hadn't been there before.

\_Is thisâ€|ash?\_

Tomoe didn't bother to ask. Instead, she simply pulled the wooden bucket she normally used to carry cleaning supplies from its position in the corner of the bedroom and raced after Atsushi. They thundered down the hallway and down the stairs, throwing open the door that could only lead to the task at hand.

Only a few yards away stood what was left of their uncle's beautiful home, now reduced to nothing but a pile of flaming ashes and charred wood. Tomoe's hands shook with fear as she neared the flames, remembering the countless times she had burned herself out of pure carelessness when stoking the fire.

Tomoe's parents and cousins were already outside, throwing bucket after bucket of water onto the raging flames. So far, they had had little success. It seemed that Uncle's home had been completely engulfed before anyone had even known there was a problem. Even if they put the fire out now, Tomoe's uncle and his child were probably

already dead.

Tomoe bit her lip; dread settling in her chest like lead.

"Be careful!" She shouted in Atsushi's direction, clutching her bucket with all of her strength.

Atsushi nodded, worry creasing his normally happy face. "I will."

Tomoe was already on the move.

She ran to the water trough and filled her bucket to the brim with the dust-filled water she found there. It wasn't much, but Tomoe hoped it would be enough to aid in extinguishing the flames.

It wasn't.

No matter how many times Tomoe ran back and forth between the trough, filling her bucket with as much water as possible and then returning to the flames, nothing seemed to change. Tomoe grew sweaty and tired, skin stained black with ash and her kimono torn, but the fire did not go out. In fact, it seemed to burn brighter, as if it was something more than just a simple flame.

Tomoe sniffed the air, coughing when she inhaled a lungful of thick, vile smoke. She couldn't smell anything that \_wasn't \_fire, but that didn't mean there was nothing there.

\_Did the samurai use gunpowder when they lit these flames?\_

Tomoe had heard of this happening before, but had never imagined it would affect her. Never once had she bothered to prepare for something of this magnitude. Tomoe had spent her entire life in a sheltered environment, hidden away from human beings in an effort to both conceal and protect their oni bloodlines. If humans discovered who they truly were, Tomoe just \_knew \_they'd seek her out and attempt to kill her. All humans were the same in that respect. They seemed to hate oni and would do anything in their power to kill them off.

Tonight was a prime example of such. A group of samurai, \_humans\_, had infiltrated Tomoe's home and mercilessly killed off two of her family members, one of which had been an \_infant. \_This, Tomoe decided, was absolutely unforgiveable.

Tomoe's hands clenched tightly around the handle of her bucket, pressing so hard against the metal that it dented in the wake of her ferocity.

"Tomoe," Her father shouted, "Get back."

The fire roared to life yet again, resurrected with greater strength. It seemed that they were losing this battle.

\_Gozen don't loose.\_

Tomoe stalked towards the flames, golden eyes narrowing as she stared into the blackened vortex of ash and smoke. A baby's cry could be heard \_just \_barely from within what little remained of her uncle's

home.

\_Jiro!\_

Tomoe knew what she had to do. She dropped her bucket, throwing it to the ground beside her, and straightened up to her full height.

\_I **\*\*must\*\*** save Jiro.\_

Tentatively at first, Tomoe gripped the nearest wooden plank. She jumped atop it, and the entire structure creaked beneath her. Quickly, Tomoe jumped onto the next plank, intent on reaching Jiro before the whole structure collapsed on top of him. The plank she was standing on snapped seconds later, falling to the ground below with a horrible, loud crack.

"\_TOMOE!\_" Her mother screamed, "DON'T YOU DARE!"

Tomoe didn't listen. Instead, she jumped.

Tomoe crashed down on top of the pile of the nearest piece of moist wood, just barely avoiding the scorching flames on her right. Her face burned with heat and Tomoe was certain she had \_many \_splinters in her exposed thighs, but that didn't stop her for long. Tomoe rose to her feet, balancing her weight as evenly as she could on two separate planks. Here, Jiro's cries were louder. She must be getting close.

Tomoe leant down, wrapping her arms around the plank beneath her and \_pulling \_as hard as she could. Tomoe wasn't very strong and wasn't making much progress, but she didn't dare let herself stop. She \_had\_ to save Jiro, no matter what.

The flames were spreading at an alarming rate. Tomoe's skin burned and her right thigh wouldn't stop quaking, but she did not let go. She did not stop pushing.

Seconds later, the plank broke, shattering beneath her weight and throwing Tomoe through the air with such force that she blacked out.

Her mother screamed.

\* \* \*

><p>Tomoe awoke, her entire body screaming with pain. Her left thigh ached the most, feeling as if someone had shoved a blade through her skin and hollowed out her bones. Tomoe gripped her thigh with one hand, rolling over and trying to sit up. Her back stung, but she ignored the pain. All she could think of was Jiro. He was only an infant, and there was no way he could save himself. If there was even a chance of him surviving, Tomoe had to push through this pain until her injuries healed.<p>

As she stood, her left thigh burned with pain yet again, and Tomoe forced herself to look down. Her eyes widened with horror when she realized that the root of her pain was not a splinter or a pulled muscle, but rather a dagger shoved hilt-deep into her flesh. Quickly, Tomoe grasped the hilt of the dagger and tore it from her thigh, hissing in pain when the dagger was pulled free. Her leg weakened,

quaking with pain as she forced herself to put more weight on the effected side as she attempted to push through the rubble.

The wound closed moments later, fading away and disappearing completely as Tomoe's flesh and bones knitted together as if sewn by an invisible needle. Silently, Tomoe thanked her oni genes for saving her \_yet again \_from imminent peril. All she needed to do now was enter her oni form, and she would be able to save Jiro.

Tomoe hadn't thought of doing so before, and it was only then that she realized most of her efforts could have been avoided if she had only taken advantage of her blood earlier. Tomoe shook her head, wiping her sweaty palms on her now-ruined kimono.

\_I'm an idiot! If Jiro is dead because of me, I'll never be able to forgive myself.\_

Tomoe bit her lip hard enough to draw blood, clenching her fists tightly. Without thinking, Tomoe leant down, grasping the now-bloody dagger she had pulled from her thigh only moments before. Upon closer examination, she realized it was her own dagger, the one her father had given her for protection. Ordinarily, Tomoe would keep it strapped to her thigh beneath her kimono, but the fall she had taken must have thrown it from the sheath, leaving the blade exposed. Cursing at her own stupidity, Tomoe rose from the ground, weapon in hand.

She drove the dagger into the plank below with all of her strength. It was only then that she noticed that her skin had taken on a cold, stone-like sheen, and her dark hair had lightened completely, and now hung loose around her shoulders in a mess of ivory waves. Tentatively, she touched her forehead, finding two small horns extending from the crown of her skull. Tomoe shivered, feeling oddly calm yet on-edge. Now, she had exposed herself as an oni to the outside world. Anyone well-hidden enough could have seen her, and they would likely run back to humankind baring the news of her lineage. Previously, Tomoe had been human-looking enough to pass as an ordinary girl, but now she could not. Even after the white had faded from her hair and the bloodlust gone, Tomoe knew there was no going back. Her eyes would remain permanently changed, her vision improved and her irises warped beyond recognition. Her father had once told her that once she became a true oni, there would be no going back. She would never \_truly \_be the same as she had before. The power would consume her, eating away at her soul until there was nothing left but a \_monster.\_

This was the curse placed upon those that played with fire.

Oni were not human, nor did they wish to be. They were demons, white like the pits of hell and stained with blood, no matter how they tried to cleanse themselves of their wrongdoings. They did not belong amongst humans, for the humans valued their heads like prizes, trading their blood for gold and "healing". The Rasetsu were monsters brought sent to rein terror upon the humans, spawned from their own greed. If they had never dared to bite the forbidden fruit, perhaps peace could have been found.

But it was not.

Now, the oni were confined to secrecy, hidden away from the humans

and locked out of sight. Tomoe despised them, the \_humans, \_for what they had done to her people. She could have had a much better life if not for the fact that she \_was \_an oni and doomed to waste away on the same piece of land she'd been born on. Tomoe and her siblings, all five of them, were not allowed to leave their homes without supervision. They were not allowed to transform into true oni until they "came of age", in an effort to keep the humans from discovering their true identities. Tomoe had never once been allowed to utilize her true powers, but had been instead confined to being a simple farmhand at her father's side for \_eternity. \_Tomoe had no other choice.

But now she did. Now, there was power coursing through Tomoe's veins like liquid lightning, send jolts of pure \_ecstasy \_down her spine whenever she so much as moved. This form was desirable, \_delicious\_, and Tomoe would be damned if she would ever go back to being weak again. She was better than that now, better than them all.

The Tomoe she had once known was gone, and this one had risen from the ashes of her corpse, hungry for blood.

Tomoe looked outward, bright yellow eyes zeroing in on her family below. They looked both apprehensive, eyes widening in surprise as they registered her new form.

"Tomoe..." Her father whispered, blood-red eyes darkening with remorse, "...is gone."

\_So he knows, then...\_

Tomoe knew should wouldn't have been able to see him as clearly as she could now if she had tried the same thing moments before her transformation. He would have been nothing but a blur, indistinguishable from the rest, his words lost to the wind. But Tomoe had seen him, and they both knew well that she had. He nodded once in her direction, a small but wicked smile spreading across his face.

Tomoe turned away from his blood-red stare and back to the task at hand. She could still hear Jiro's cries, though they were much weaker now. At this rate, the child would suffocate before she could reach him. Tomoe growled low in her throat, tearing the dagger from the wood in irritation when she realized that she had made little headway in the past few minutes.

\_I can't waste anymore time!\_

Tomoe knew that in this form she possessed incredible strength and agility her normal form lacked. \_If I punch this board\_, she realized, \_it should break. I don't need this dagger!\_ Tomoe did just that, rearing back and slamming her fist into the wood with every ounce of strength she possessed. A crack so loud that it could be mistaken for thunder sounded from the board as it fell apart, collapsing in the middle and breaking into pieces. Tomoe dove through the opening the board had previously blocked, tumbling into what was left of her uncle's home and collapsing on the ground. From the looks of it, the kitchenette was all that remained. Tomoe could only assume that it was farthest from the source of the flames, but even that explanation left her confused. The fire had been raging for at least two hours now. There was no way anything should be left!

But there was.

Tomoe could hear Jiro's cries much more clearly now that she was inside. He sounded parched and half-dead, but Tomoe couldn't figure out where he was. The whole room was darkened and falling to pieces, blackened with soot and reeking of charr. Tomoe pulled the hem of her kimono up, shielding her nose from the offensive fumes as she attempted to locate Jiro.

\_His cries seem to be coming from the left... But I don't see him anywhere!\_

Tomoe dropped to her knees and crawled along the floor, searching for Jiro's tiny form. If he was anywhere, he had to be on the ground or in his father's arms. \_There's no way he'd be up high\_, she reasoned.

After a several moments of fruitless searching, Tomoe was beginning to grow more and more agitated. She could \_clearly\_ hear him and she knew he was coming from this direction, but Tomoe was yet to lay eyes on the infant. It was as if he had turned invisible!

"Jiro!" She called, trying to sound as comforting as possible, "I'm coming!"

Tomoe did her best to reassure Jiro- wherever he was- through her words, but she wasn't sure she had done a very good job. Tomoe had never been particularly good with words or speaking, preferring to isolate herself from others rather than engage with them. According to her father, this was how it should be. In his mind, women- no matter their species- should be seen and not heard, which caused him to urge his only daughter to keep quiet and simply complete her chores. As a result of this, Tomoe often had little to say when she wasn't out of her mind with anger or confusion. Even now, she wasn't sure what to say.

A particularly loud "wah!" reached Tomoe's ears seconds later and she brightened. \_Jiro must be close\_, she thought, smiling beneath the fabric of her kimono.

Tomoe sensed moment nearby and quickly made her way over to its place of origin. It was Jiro, hidden beneath a fallen curtain. He wiggled and cried beneath the fabric, looking more like a lump than a baby. Tomoe quickly removed the offending fabric, revealing the tiny five-month-old that was only just barely alive. Jiro's normally bright golden eyes were glassy and tired, his irises a peculiar gray. His face and body were smeared with soot and ashes clung to his skin as if they were trying to bury him alive. Quickly, Tomoe lifted him into her arms and held him close, albeit a little awkwardly. She had only held Jiro once or twice since his birth, since his shrew of a mother didn't trust Tomoe enough to allow her anywhere near him.

Tomoe snorted at the irony in the situation at hand. Tomoe's aunt was shrewd and horribly over-protective of her child, but when he actually needed her help she wouldn't lift a finger, whereas Tomoe had jumped into a \_flaming building\_ just to rescue a cousin she barely knew. \_Perhaps I'm the stupid one\_, Tomoe thought, \_He's just a baby, after all, and you can make more of those.\_

\_It's not worth losing your life.\_

But such thoughts hadn't crossed Tomoe's mind when she had chosen to rescue Jiro. All she had been thinking of was that he needed her, and there was no way she was going to let an innocent child die when she could have saved him. Perhaps it was the code of honor so heavily coveted by the Gozen samurai that had bled into Tomoe's mind, warping her ways of thinking. The Gozen believed that all innocent oni should be saved, no matter the costs. Someone like Tomoe's Aunt had no place among them, much less as the wife of the clan leader's brother.

"I'll take you to your mother now, alright?" Tomoe said, keeping her voice low and soothing.

Jiro just stared at the wall, completely silent now that he had been rescued. Tomoe's brows creased with worry. Jiro was a loud, happy baby- from what she knew, anyway- and his behavior now was certainly unlike him. He wasn't pulling at her hair or giggling like he usually did, much less smiling. \_

\_I hope he's alright! \_Tomoe thought. Something about the child was comforting, as if he reminded her of the old Tomoe- the one that didn't have icy white hair and glowing yellow eyes, and enough strength to shatter buildings whenever she tried. It was as if he was calling her back to him, back to his normalcy and promises.

\_There's no way he's doing that, \_Tomoe decided with a dismissive shake of her head, He's just a baby!

Jiro didn't make a single sound when Tomoe leapt from the ground and back up to the rooftop, nor did he complain when she retrieved the dagger from before and jumped off the side of the building. In fact, he didn't even move.\_

Tomoe landed on the ground with Jiro in her arms, long white hair flowing behind her in time with the wind. She stalked across the yard, moving through the crowd as easily as breathing. Her stance was animalistic and the way she walked was completely different from the way she had before. Before, this woman had been "Momo", a quiet, barely-there woman with tired eyes and a gaunt face. She had never been particularly aggressive and had instead kept to herself, quietly working through her chores with the meticulousness of a genius but with the confidence of a mouse. That Tomoe wasn't beautiful, but was instead plain and pensive, worn-through like an old sweater. Her cousins were beautiful and had suitors lined up, all begging for their hands in marriage, while Tomoe had never garnered any interest from the opposite sex or otherwise. She was simply there, but she had never done anything, never fought, lived, or died trying. Tomoe had never defended her beliefs, but had simply done what everyone else ordered her to do, bending like a willow in the breeze to each and every whim. Tomoe had lived a grey, dark life, filled with nothing but chores and orders and etiquette above all else. She had been taught not to smile, not to laugh, not to feel, lest she unleash the power of her oni lineage. All the Gozen had been this way, wired from the beginning to follow each and every order without complaint.

\_That's not real living, \_Tomoe decided, That's just not



dying.\_

And it was in that moment that Tomoe vowed to never be that way again. Never again would she trail after her brothers like a lost puppy, taking their every order with the utmost seriousness. Never again would she wait in the background while those around her fought and died.

Never again would she fail to bring pride to the Gozen name.

\* \* \*

><p>Author's Note:<p>

\*\*Dedicated to Mod Mori of the OC Hospital on Tumblr! \*\*She helped me a lot with her posts, and Tomoe wouldn't be here without her tips.

I don't believe that "women should be seen but not heard." Remember, Hakuouki is set back when that sort of thing was a common belief, and including it in this fic is sort of important to Tomoe's development.

I know her personality changed \_really \_fast. As to why that is should be revealed in the next chapter ;)

Also, this is going to eventually be OC x Canon, and will contain spoilers for both the game and anime. \*\*Read the next chapters with caution\*\*.

Feedback is always appreciated, and do let me know if I made any typos so I can correct them. :)

-MSM-

## 2. Chapter One:

\*\*Chapter One: Two Halves of the Same Heart\*\*

"I am  
>finally<br>starting to understand  
>that I will<br>never  
>escape myself."<p>

â€" Michelle K., \_Two Handfuls of Time\_

...

\_Never again would she fail to bring pride to the Gozen name.\_

Tomoe's father would have none of it. As soon as he was close enough to touch her, he seized Tomoe roughly by the shoulders and shook her as hard as he could. Tomoe shrieked, kicking and flailing in his arms.

"What are you doing, you crazy old man?!" She screamed.

Jinpachi slapped her as hard as he could, his normally calm demeanor completely gone. He was against hitting women, but it seemed Tomoe

was a different matter entirely.

"Snap out of it, Tomoe!" He shouted.

An enormous red handprint stained Tomoe's formerly smooth cheek, and for a moment, Jinpachi feared he had completely destroyed his already-strained relationship with his eldest child. \_Even before today's events\_, he reflected, T\_omoe and I have never had the best relationship\_. Perhaps it was because he placed too much pressure on her, or perhaps he didn't exert enough. He could never tell with her... Tomoe was about as easy to read as a blank piece of paper.

Jinpachi's hands clenched Tomoe's shoulders so tightly that they began to bruise, forming dark welts beneath his grip. In her arms, Jiro's eyes crossed; still sick from the shaking both he and Tomoe had endured only moments before.

"This isn't you," Tomoe's father insisted, "This isn't you \_at all\_."

And he was right.

The Tomoe Gozen he knew was quiet and gentle, a pushover that just \_couldn't\_ say no. She completed each and every one of her chores without a single complaint, never putting up a fight or giving him any lip. She was almost \_too\_ good, Jinpachi decided, and that in itself was probably why she was reacting so negatively to the transformation. He had been quietly killing Tomoe her entire life, metaphorically suffocating her beneath pile after pile of chores and work. He couldn't bare to look at her when she was idle, preferring to work her until her hands bled and then some. Jinpachi was that way with all of his children, but then again, his other children were \_boys\_. \_Jinpachi didn't know how to treat his daughter and had instead chosen to isolate her, keeping her locked away within their home when she wasn't completing her chores. Jinpachi didn't know what he was afraid of\_— perhaps humanity?— but whatever it was had clouded his judgement.

Tomoe glared at him, bright yellow eyes glinting in the morning sunlight, and Jinpachi wanted to retch. His only daughter, his Momo, was reduced to nothing more than a hissing demon because of what \_he\_ had done. It wasn't her fault he had treated her the way he had. All these years, Jinpachi had fooled himself into believing that he was doing the right thing, even when he wasn't.

And now he had to pay the price.

"What are you talking about? I've never been better!" Tomoe shrieked, cackling hysterically.

Jinpachi shook his head. "You're not yourself, Tomoe. This power isn't good for you, not good at all. Return to normal, and we can pretend this \_never\_ happened, alright?"

"No. I don't want to be your little porcelain doll anymore, Father. I'm not even pretty, so what's the point of keeping me locked away?"

Jinpachi pulled her closer to him, pressing his forehead against her

own. The rage seemed to seep from Tomoe's body whenever he spoke, as if he was seconds away from detonating a bomb. He had to pick his next words carefully, that was for sure.

"You'll find someone," He lied.

Inwardly, Jinpachi feared the worst- his daughter will \_never \_find someone to spend the rest of her life with. Oni loved beauty, and they actively seek it out in a mate. Male oni search for radiance and dazzling smiles with bright personalities and smooth, pale skin. His daughter, \_Tomoe, \_might have status as the heiress of the Gozen but didn't possess much else worth dwelling on. She wasn't overly attractive- in fact, she was rather plain- nor did she possess any entertaining talents. Tomoe was tanned and tall, and as lean and lanky as any of her brothers. She wasn't curvaceous or well endowed, and her smile was as shaky as her hands when she was nervous. Tomoe was... Tomoe, and Jinpachi feared that she would never be up to par with what anyone else desired.

It seemed he made yet another mistake.

Tomoe kicked him in the shins with a vicious ferocity, as if she had read his mind and was now using his thoughts to fuel her anger. Jinpachi was amazed by her physical strength but he hardly had time to dwell on this factor, for Tomoe had always begun to shriek with rage.

"DON'T," She shrieked, kicking him with each word she spoke, "LIE TO ME!"

Without thinking, Tomoe reached into her hip holster and drew the dagger, preparing to stab her father in an effort to free herself from his grasp. Jinpachi gasped at the sight of the glinting metal, suddenly wishing he hadn't left his sword behind when he had left to put out the fires that morning.

\_I can't block her! \_He thought.

\_I'll kill him! \_was all that was on Tomoe's mind.

Jiro chose that moment to spit up. Vomit splattered all over both Tomoe and her father's forms, and the rest of the Gozen seemed to hold their breaths as they waited for Tomoe to react. Given her recent behavior, they could only assume that she was going to kill poor Jiro for humiliating her in such a manner.

It was just the opposite.

At first, Tomoe seemed to twitch, shaking in her father's grasp like a leaf in the wind. And in that same moment, Tomoe's ivory hair began to darken until it was the same peculiar shade of dark green it had always been, but it seemed to retain its wavier consistency rather than returning to being stick-straight. Her skin didn't change, however, and continued to give off an odd, stone-cold chill, leaving her considerably paler than before. Tomoe's horns receded; disappearing beneath her flesh until there was no trace of them ever existing in the first place.

But her eyes didn't change at all. They stayed just as they had been in her oni form, cold and condescending, with long, dark eyelashes

and snake-like pupils. Tomoe's eyes had previously been more of a golden color, flecked with streaks of blood red, and while they may have been bizarre by human standards, they had never once appeared condescending. The Tomoe they knew had never looked down on anyone. It simply wasn't her way.

"Father?" Tomoe whispered, sounding shaken, "What happened?"

Relief flooded the man's face.

"Thank goodness!" Jinpachi cried, sounding thoroughly relieved.

He made no move to hug his daughter, but he did offer a small smile in her direction. Tomoe's eyes brightened at the sight of his affections, and she seemed so overwhelmed that she almost dropped Jiro. Sensing her confusion, Jinpachi quickly took the child from her and returned him to his mother, lest Tomoe accidentally kill him.

"What did I do?" She whispered.

The dagger fell to the ground beside her, glinting dangerously in the morning sunlight. Jinpachi couldn't fathom the horror Tomoe must have felt when she saw the blade fall from her fingertips, so dangerously close to piercing his flesh only moments before.

Tomoe collapsed on the ground and buried her face in her now-empty palms. Jinpachi couldn't figure out if she was crying or not, but he decided it was best to probably leave her alone. He didn't know what to do when women cried. He never had, and he certainly didn't now.

"Nothing," He lied, "You didn't do anything at all."

Jinpachi's hands twitched at his sides, itching to wrap around his daughter's smaller form and hold her close. He had never done such a thing before, and Jinpachi couldn't help but wonder why he felt the need to now. Was it because his daughter was finally an adult? Or was he trying to make up for lost time?

Something in his daughter's red-rimmed eyes told him it was far too late to start now.

\* \* \*

><p><em>They left me alone, didn't they?<em>

Tomoe opened her dry eyes, blanching when she realized that it was almost noon. The sun was almost directly above her head, which meant she was horribly behind in her daily chores. If she didn't catch up now, she'd be up all night!

>Tomoe jogged towards the barn where they stored the hay, intent on completing her day's work before she could cause any more trouble.<p>

Tomoe didn't want to think about what had happened earlier that morning. She didn't. Whatever had happened was in the past, she decided, and she couldn't let it ruin her life. So what if she was a true oni now? She still had to do chores like everyone else!

Tomoe was oddly numb, as if the morning's events had washed away all of her emotions, leaving her as smooth and hardened as a river pebble. She didn't feel like herself, or anyone, really. In fact, Tomoe barely felt alive. Dread seemed to have settled into her gut, weighing down her heart until she was nothing but an empty shell. Tomoe sighed aloud, pressing her fingertips onto her stomach as she attempted to alleviate the pain she felt there. Nothing changed, even after she concentrated all of her energy into that single, specific spot.

\_Is this... guilt? \_

Tomoe felt like crying. Oni blood couldn't get rid of guilt, which meant she was stuck with this horrible sense of perpetual dread and disappointment for the foreseeable future- maybe even the rest of her life. She still couldn't believe she'd threaten to kill her own father, someone who \_loved \_her, over something as trivial as a white lie. Tomoe had always known that she wasn't the prettiest or the smartest, and was probably one of the worst in both categories. It wasn't hard to figure out when all she had to compare herself to was her gorgeous mother, brilliant brothers and siren-like cousins. Tomoe knew she was bland and dry, like a stale cracker, whereas those around her were alive and exciting- like fireworks. But that was no excuse for her behavior. \_  
><em>

Tomoe must have acted out of her own free will, but she couldn't understand why she'd even think of doing such a thing, much less attempt it. It wasn't like her at all, and it definitely wasn't something a Gozen should have done. As heiress, Tomoe had specific responsibilities and morale to uphold. Because she was lacking in the beauty categories, Tomoe forced herself to make up for it with patience and calm understanding, though she was rather easy to anger no matter how hard she tried to behave otherwise. Just this morning, she had snapped at Atsushi for warning her about the fire, something that was wholly underserved on her brother's part.

\_Am I really a bad person? \_Tomoe wondered.

Tomoe had spent her entire life striving for false perfection. She had always done her best to be kind to others and follow the rules, but even then she wasn't good enough, \_false.\_ It was as if her relatives had seen right through her this whole time but had allowed her to continue acting out her little routine without complaint.

Now, Tomoe saw who she truly was.

She had been an oni her entire life, but she had never been a \_true \_oni. She had never taken advantage of her power or even attempted to, though nothing had truly barred her from reaching her full potential. Her parents had forbidden her, yes, but that was a mere verbal warning against a lifetime of curiosity. Why had she always obeyed? Why hadn't she pushed the envelope just once?  
>Tomoe understood now.<p>

Her parents had never wanted her to be anything other than what she already was. They were happy with a weak daughter and five strong sons, as long as she did her chores and never talked back. They had always been protecting her from harm, shielding her from pain with

their own forms... But now, now she had broken their trust and crumbled their rules, reducing their well-intentioned efforts into mere dust.

\_Why didn't I listen?\_

A single tear dripped down her cheek, falling from her chin and onto the ground. Tomoe didn't register the sadness until it was too late, and by then the floodgates had already opened. Tear after tear followed its predecessor down Tomoe's delicate jawline, splashing onto the dry earth like rain. She hadn't allowed herself to cry earlier, when the wounds had been fresh, but now she was releasing her grip on her emotions and simply letting it all flow out. Tomoe had to steady herself against a nearby tree, hiding her face in her forearms in an effort to keep her tears from being spotted by any passerby. The last thing she wanted was for one of her brothers to see her crying and then run off to their father. They were all two-faced, each and every one of them, and Tomoe couldn't trust them with anything.

Sure enough, her eldest younger brother appeared out of nowhere only seconds later, brandishing a fleshly-killed rabbit and a bloody katana.

"Whatcha doing, sis?" Haru asked, feigning cheerfulness to hide his obvious concern.

Tomoe sniffed, wiping her nose on her long-since ruined kimono sleeve.

"Nothing," She whimpered pathetically.

"So you're a real oni now, right? That's \_so \_cool!" Haru gushed, hopping in place as he smiled widely.

Tomoe just barely resisted the urge to roll her eyes. Haru was a good person and a good brother but he was \_so \_annoying that even her mother sometimes couldn't put up with him. He insisted on wearing a mask of false happiness at all times, no matter how grim the situation, and Tomoe could only assume he was doing the same thing now.

\_I'm not a charity case! \_She wanted to shout.

"Not really," Tomoe replied, rubbing at her dry eyes with a clenched fist, "Nothing's different."

"Really? Are you sure? 'Cuz I'm pretty sure you weren't this dirty before." Haru deadpanned, tilting his head to the side.

Tomoe's eyes widened, and it was only then that she realized she was positively \_filthy. \_Diving into a fire probably hadn't been the best idea, especially if she wanted to look presentable.

Tomoe jogged over to the nearby koi pond and crouched down, pushing a strand of hair out of her face. The Tomoe she saw gazing back at her was by far the dirtiest creature she had ever laid eyes on. It was so bad that the grime beneath her fingernails paled in comparison. Her hair was stained almost completely black with soot and filled with flakes of ashes while her skin looked as if it had been totally

covered in mud. Tomoe's kimono, which had never been very attractive to begin with, was torn and stained beyond recognition. The skirt had been almost completely torn away on her left side, leaving Tomoe feeling \_horribly\_ exposed in all the wrong ways. She looked like a prostitute!

Tomoe blanched at her reflection, suddenly taking pity on Haru for having to deal with her unsightly appearance at such an early hour in the day. Haru was more of a nightowl than she was, keeping peculiar hours and almost never being awake when you needed him. Tomoe could only assume it was "late" in his eyes.

"See?" Haru teased, happily clapping his hands together in an effort to better emphasize his words.

"I do," Tomoe replied simply, scarcely able to resist the urge to throw herself headfirst into the koi pond. She would have, too, if not for the fact that the soot would likely kill the fish.

"Maybe you should go home and take a bath," Someone else suggested.

Tomoe looked up, recognizing the voice and scowling when she did. The voice belonged to none other than her second cousin Hiroki, an arrogant boy with a slick smile that made Tomoe feel sick to her stomach just by looking at him. Tomoe's father had once threatened to marry her off to him if she didn't behave, much to Tomoe's horror.

"You look like shit," Hiroki told her, pulling a cigarette from his pocket and striking the tip with a match. Smoke soon filled the air and it made Tomoe want to fly across the yard and strangle him. She had spent the better part of her morning inside a \_burning building, \_and the first thing he wanted to when he was in her presence was \_smoke?!\_

"Can you... not do that, please?" She asked quietly, crossing her fingers behind her back and praying for luck.

Hiroki shook his head, "Like hell I'm gonna listen to a \_woman.\_"

\_Will any one ever?\_

Tomoe bit her lip. "But-"

"I said no already, so stop bothering me!" Hiroki shouted.

He inhaled a lungful of smoke and blew rings in Tomoe's face just to bother her. Tomoe let him get away with it twice, thinking that \_surely \_he would come to his senses before the worst could happen.

"Please stop," Tomoe repeated, with more force this time.

Hiroki didn't listen.

Beside him, Haru glanced anxiously between them, eyes wide with worry.

"I don't think you should do that, 'Roki! Sis is a real oni now, which means she can kick your ass if you make her angry enough. I don't know about you, but I don't think you should go there." Haru advised, sounding sensible for the first time ever.

Hiroki snorted.

"I'm not afraid of her," He bragged.

Tomoe saw \_red. \_

"Who do you think you are?!" She hissed, venomous words pouring from her mouth like a raging waterfall. Everything she had ever wanted to say to Hiroki was tumbling out, and Tomoe had no way to stop it.

"You've \_always \_been mean to me, ever since we were children. You're annoying and loud and I\_ \*\*can't \*\*\_stand being around you, but I have to deal with you \_every single goddamned day. \_All I ask is that you don't smoke around me- seeing as I spent the better part of my morning inside a burning building- and you won't even listen to \_that?! \_That's such a simple command! What's wrong with you?" Tomoe barked, bright eyes burning into Hiroki's own with the intensity of molten lava.

"\_How dare you treat me this way."\_

Silence filled the clearing. It was as if Tomoe had just committed an unfathomable sin and Haru and Hiroki had been left in the wake of its destruction. They were both still, frozen in place and utterly \_shocked. \_Hiroki's cigarette fell from his open mouth and rolled to the ground, where its flame suffocated beside a tuft of dark green grass. Tomoe sighed with relief, the object of her torment gone.

"Sis?" Haru tried, "Are you sure you're alright?"

Tomoe blinked.

She was tempted to say \_no, I'm not, \_but stopped halfway. Making Haru worry for her was hardly a good idea, and she certainly couldn't pour her heart out in front of Hiroki. There was no telling what he'd do to her!

"I'm fine," She murmured, ducking her head in apology.

Beside Haru, Hiroki shivered.

"Damn frost bitch," He spat, backing away from Tomoe and abandoning the clearing.

\_Coward, \_Tomoe thought, \_face me like a man. You dare call yourself a samurai?\_

She covered her mouth, yellow eyes wide. Never had she thought such rude things, even with Hiroki! Tomoe knew her mother would have been horribly disappointed in her behavior if she had been able to hear Tomoe's thoughts at that very moment. Mikoto had raised her daughter to be kind to all; no matter what treatment she received in return. As a result, Tomoe had grown into the sort of person that



internalized all their pain, locking it away behind tiny smiles and shaking hands. Hiroki had bullied her since she was a child and Tomoe had never once been able to confront him- before today, that is.

\_It seems that everything has changed today.\_

Tomoe could scarcely believe it was happening herself. Had the transformation changed her so drastically that she was no longer herself? Tomoe had fully expected this, to an extent anyway, but what was happening far surpassed any of her wildest fantasies. Never had she expected something of this magnitude to effect her, wiping away who she truly was in an effort to begin anew.

"Don't listen to him, m'kay?" Haru said, smooth voice jolting Tomoe from her thoughts.

Tomoe nodded fervently, messy olive bangs hiding her eyes.

If Haru had been able to see them, Tomoe knew he would have been able to see through her lies and under no circumstances could she allow that to happen.

"And maybe go take a shower. I think Dad has something more important for us to worry about than chores, and you definitely can't help us when you look like \_that.\_"

Tomoe wrinkled her nose, laughing through her unshed tears. "I look pretty bad, don't I?"

She had no idea what her father had planned, but Tomoe could only assume that whatever it was, it wasn't pretty. She wondered if it was time to slaughter the sheep again, but dismissed the thought entirely. It wasn't spring yet, but rather deep winter, when snow covered the ground and their breath was icy cold with steam. The sky overhead was bleak and grey, and smoke clouded the air and stained its surroundings with ashes and soot. Tomoe had never seen an uglier thing... Besides her reflection, that is.

"Yeah... And don't take this the wrong way or anything, but is that \_vomit \_in your hair?"

Tomoe blanched.

\* \* \*

><p>Tomoe and Haru had parted ways, with Haru leaving in the direction he'd come, rabbit in tow, and Tomoe heading home with her kimono in tatters. She knew her mother would have a fit when she saw what Tomoe had done to her kimono up close, but Tomoe didn't want to think about the negative repercussions at the moment. She just wanted to go home and <em>sleep. <em>It had been a long night and an even longer morning, and Tomoe was honestly fed up with the world.

She shuffled along the tree-line, sandals leaving dark stains on the snow with each step she took. It seemed the soot had attached itself to every fibre of Tomoe's being and was now refusing to let up.

\_This, \_Tomoe grumbled, \_is going to be a bitch to clean.\_

Laundry was already part of her long list of responsibilities as the eldest child in her family. Tomoe had enough on her plate without all the unnecessary side-effects that came with her new transformation without the addition of cleaning and mending one of her only kimonos. Tomoe didn't want to sound ungrateful, but she \_hated \_chores. She'd been doing them her entire life, and Tomoe thought it was well past time for a break. She could only hope that her father's "news" was that she was relieved from her duties and was now free to do what she liked, but Tomoe knew that was nothing more than wishful thinking. She was the eldest of six and the heiress of her clan, born into a set of iron-clad rules that her family followed to the letter.

As a woman, Tomoe was supposed to stay silent and hidden away until the eve of her betrothal. Only after marriage was she allowed to live freely, but Tomoe doubted her parents would follow through. Her father had always been the type to break his promises, no matter how important they were to his daughter. It wasn't that he didn't care Jinpachi would insist, \_I'm just too busy.\_

\_No time for you.\_

Tomoe wasn't sure if her father loved her at all. He kept her hidden at all times, locked away inside the compound like a prisoner. Tomoe had \_never once \_been allowed outside the borders of their property, even with the protection of all five of her brothers. It was as if he was trying to hide something from her, Tomoe thought... \_But what? \_What was it that was so dangerous that the Gozen couldn't risk allowing her clan heiress more than three feet outside on her own?

It couldn't be the humans that made them so terrified. The humans were imbeciles according to her father, and one must never fear the stupidity of another. Lesser beings like them weren't strong enough to cause real trouble to oni. It seemed that all they could do was set fire to buildings, but \_anyone \_could do that.

\_What could it be, then?\_

Biting her lip, Tomoe shook her head. She was far too tired to be thinking rationally at this point. All she wanted to do was go home and \_sleep, \_but there was no way she could do that until she cleaned up. Her mother would kill her if she stained the tatami.

"Troublesome," Tomoe muttered, kicking at a stray pebble with the tip of her formerly-pristine sandal.

\_Great... Now I sound like Eiji.\_

Eiji was Tomoe's third-youngest brother and by far the strangest person Tomoe had ever met. He was bizarrely philosophical for a child his age and spent most of his time holed up in a self-made cave hidden in the woods on the very edge of the Gozen property. Eiji was disturbingly pale with hair the color of bones and eyes of obsidian black that gleamed in the darkness. He often looked as if he was already in his oni form despite the fact that he had never utilized it- that Tomoe knew, anyway. Eiji rarely spoke, but when he did it was usually just a barely-there whine about how \_troublesome \_everyone else was. Eiji was content with absolute silence and preferred to be solitary, hence the fact that Tomoe \_barely \_knew her own brother despite the fact that they'd been siblings their entire

lives. It was ridiculous, but it was something Tomoe had grown accustomed to. Her brothers were bizarre creatures, all uniquely their own yet extremely similar. Tomoe was the odd man out, the sole female in a group of six. Female oni were rare and purebloods were even rarer- according to her father, that is. Tomoe couldn't understand herself why \_everyone \_seemed to be dying these days.

"Me neither," Eiji whispered, suddenly ghosting up behind Tomoe to pull at a strand of her long hair.

Tomoe jumped, heart pounding in her chest when she realized that he brother had been able to sneak up on her without her hearing a single sound. Ordinarily, Tomoe prided herself on having sharp hearing and a good sense of smell. She could normally sense a person's presence before they were aware she was there at all, but today everything seemed off. She hadn't been able to find Jiro at first and she \_definitely \_hadn't smelt her brother. Perhaps all the soot was getting to her.

"How'd you guess what I was thinking?" Tomoe asked quietly, staring at her feet.

"I can hear you." Eiji stated, shoving his hands into the pockets of his muddied haori.

Tomoe quirked a brow, eyes wide with shock, but asked no questions. Eiji offered no answers. Instead, they silently made their way home, as respectful two meters apart.

"I'm impressed," Eiji said when they reached the threshold of their home, "Your oni form is exquisite."

\_You're weird, \_Tomoe wanted to say, \_but you're family.\_

Eiji nodded, messy white bangs flopping in his face, "I'm well aware. Bye, sister."

He disappeared just as quickly as he arrived, leaving Tomoe horribly confused and no less filthy than she had been before his arrival.

\_What, \_she wondered, \_was the point in that? \_Eiji would have been better off not speaking to her at all, especially since he hadn't even intended to head home. \_Why on earth did he even bother?\_

When Tomoe moved to open the door, she found a piece of paper wedged in the doorjam and shivered violently. \_Brother, \_she thought, \_you really are a ghost.\_

Tomoe heard nothing but the wind as it blew through the trees in response, and it was not until much later that she realized she did not see her brother again for three weeks.

\* \* \*

><p>Jinpachi chewed on his lower lip, completely ignoring the fact that he was drawing blood. His brother- who had left at dawn to chase after the humans that had dared to trifle with the Gozen- had only just returned, drenched in his own blood and milky-eyed. Jinpachi was relieved to find that his brother hadn't been in his burning home at

all, but all the more disturbed to find that his wife had <em>chosen  
<em>to leave Baby Jiro behind. His eldest had done the right thing,  
he supposed, but at a terrible cost.

He needed to move.

Now that the humans knew their location, it was only a matter of time before they came at them full-force. The fire had been child's play compared to what the humans likely planned to do as soon as they possessed the resources. The Gozen had lived in absolute secrecy for as long as Jinpachi could remember. They did not associate with outsiders and held no merit within the oni community. They were isolated and lonesome people, formerly confined to the graveyards of the land that eventually grew into the capitol city of Edo. They had faded away, wiped clean from the minds of their otherkin and into \_nothingness. \_

Jinpachi liked it that way. He liked silence and serenity, and at the end of the day, he liked \_control. \_He was the clan head and the patriarch of his clan, the king of his proverbial castle. He made the rules and the others followed his lead, just like the sheep they raised. They had been trained from birth to obey their leaders, to bow in submission and go with the flow that was the samurai lifestyle. Once, Jinpachi had been just like them.

But not anymore. Now, he was king, and his children followed \_him. \_His father had been a fool, trusting the humans, but Jinpachi was not so naïve. He knew what the humans did to oni, \_he knew. \_He would not allow his children to suffer the same fate as his father, mangled beyond recognition and screaming for help that had never come. Humans were the monsters, not the oni.

For some reason, the rest of the world believed it was the other way around. The oni were hunted, blood stolen and spilled without care, and one by one, they fell. Now, only thirteen clans remained, and even fewer purebloods still survived today. Jinpachi shuddered at the thought of his kind mixing with humans. Bile rose in the back of his throat at the idea of his children, Tomoe especially, \_ever \_reproducing with a human. The children those sort produced were never quite right. They always seemed too weak or too strong for their own good, and one by one they all met their ends.

Jinpachi would not allow his children to die in the same disgraceful manner as his father had.

One by one, his brothers turned to him, dark eyes expectant. It was only then that he realized he had spoken aloud.

"So," Susa said, "What shall we do?"

Jinpachi light a cigarette to calm his jittery nerves and eyed the map with caution. He ruled out Edo and Kyoto, as well as the other major human capitols and territories. With those areas eliminated, he could only think of one place safe enough for his clan.

Without thinking, Jinpachi stabbed the light end of his cigarette onto the map. Smoke clouded the air, choking him, but Jinpachi didn't bother to react.

"There," He said, pointing to the charred smudge with the tip of his

index finger, "Teuri Island, Hokkaido."

\_The island where Tomoe was born... And where Setsuko died...\_

\* \* \*

><p>The sun had long since disappeared behind the mountain peaks when Tomoe was finally able to scrub herself clean. Finding a free moment where the bathroom <em>wasn't <em>occupied was a true rarity in a house inhabited by five messy, active boys and one obediently clean teenage girl. By the time Tomoe had managed to find a free moment, she was well beyond fed up with her siblings.

Scowling, Tomoe sunk into the wash basin, splashing water onto the floor in her haste but far too tired to care. As far as she was concerned, this day had only grown worse as it had gone along. First, fire, then her childhood bully in combination with her hyper-active little brother, and had finished off with a few ominous words from Eiji.

\_Not fun at all, \_Tomoe grouched.

Her thigh ached in a weird, phantom sort of way just around the area of the stab wound from that morning. Absentmindedly, Tomoe kneaded the flesh around her thigh with a clenched fist, hissing in pain when she pressed too hard on the still-sensitive flesh.

"Ow," Tomoe muttered.

Instantly, her mother was pounding at the door and shrieking.

"Tomoe! Are you alright in there?! Respond right away or I'm coming in, no matter what." Her mother barked.

Tomoe rolled her eyes but responded anyway, largely out of fear of her mother knocking down the door while she was still fully naked, "Mother, please. I'm fine. Just a bit sore is all."

"Are you sure you're alright? You didn't sound alright just then!" Mikoto sounded uncertain, which only served to irritate Tomoe further.

"Mother," She repeated, "I'm \_fine.\_"

\_I'm not a baby!\_

Mikoto went quiet and Tomoe could just barely hear her shuffling away. Almost instantly, Tomoe regretted her behavior. Her mother had only been concerned, and she had mouthed off for no good reason other than her own exhaustion. Tomoe could hardly understand her own behavior today.

\_I'm off the chain, \_She mused, kneading at her sore thigh with more force this time, as if she was trying to punish herself for her misbehavior. The warm water churned around Tomoe's form as she repeatedly slammed her fist into her thigh with all of her strength. It stung so badly Tomoe almost teared up, but it made her feel significantly better than she had only moments before.

Her flesh purpled and bruised, turning black beneath the bathwater like smudges of ink, and then faded away as quickly as it had appeared. Tomoe took a deep breath, struggling to regulate her breathing as she mulled over the day's events. She didn't quite know what she had been expecting, but it certainly wasn't this. Everything she did now was too forceful and crass, and nothing like the way she should have been behaving. Turning into a true oni had obviously been a bad decision.

Tomoe deftly ran a hand through her tangled hair, scalp burning when she tugged just a little too hard on a knot. She tugged harder until the knot pulled loose, along with several clumps of her now-wavy dark green hair. Tomoe watched it fall from her scalp and into the rapidly cooling bath water, feeling oddly numb. It was if her mind and her body were no longer in synch.

Tomoe decided it was time to leave the bathroom and proceeded to pour most of her bathwater out the window. Hiroki happened to be walking by at around this time, in deep conversation with Haru, and they both wound up soaked. Tomoe slammed the window shut before they could get a good look at her face and smiled softly to herself. Finally, she had won the battle.

She could hear Hiroki yelling outside, spewing profanities Tomoe didn't know existed, and Tomoe decided that her day hadn't been so bad after all.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note:<strong>

So there you have it! Tomoe isn't completely out of her mind, but she is a bit... angrier, thanks to the transformation. The Gozen are all pretty afraid of their "final forms," unlike the other oni clans, though their fear is pretty understandable.

Also, I want to emphasize something here: Tomoe is pretty ugly. Not completely ugly (because no one is) but she's completely plain-Jane, especially when compared to pretty characters like Chizuru and Sen. I've seen a lot of characters that are prettier than these two and I felt it was time for someone that wasn't. She does have her good points, but she is only as ugly as she feels- which is a lot. She might become a bit prettier as the story goes on and she develops as a person, but not for awhile. So until then, you guys are stuck with her as she is. ;)

Anyhow, Tomoe isn't completely useless and can actually fight, but she won't until a few chapters from now. Since she's a lady during the Samurai Era, that sort of thing isn't really "proper". She doesn't use a katana, though, I'll tell you that.

And now for my final point- Tomoeonly behaved so weirdly because she was suddenly confident and capable. She felt like she could do anything, which led to brief arrogance and a bad attitude. All the power went to her head, no? I know I probably overdid the emphasizing on this part but I feel like it was necessary. I need it to be blatantly obvious that she really isn't this way, but having power that great is turning her into a monster.

\*\*Bless you all for reading! \*kiss\*\*\*

-MSM-

End  
file.